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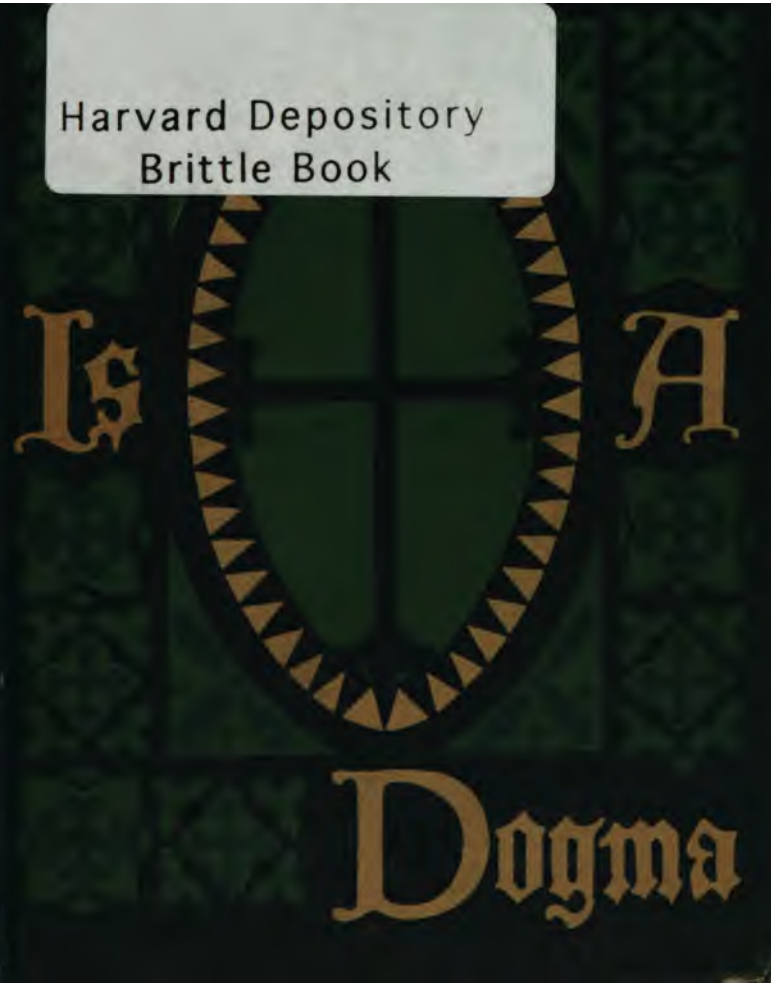

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What is a Dogma?

by

Edouard Le Roy

Translated by

Lydia G. Robinson

Chicago and London
The Open Court Publishing Company
1918

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PUBLISHER'S PREFACE.

"THE primary significance of a dogma is not its speculative content, but the speculative truth of dogma is expressed in terms of action." Such is the proclamation of a Roman Catholic thinker which has evoked a lively discussion, and although his work has been placed on the Index, this has evidently been for other reasons than any connected with the charge of heresy. For this thesis defines the general concept of dogma in the expressions of the well-known philosophy of action originated by Maurice Blondel and published in his book *L'action* which appeared in 1893, and as far as we know his book was not placed on the Index. "Perhaps," writes Father E. Bernard Allo, O. P., "the thesis sketched by Le Roy is not so different,

perhaps the divergencies are less in idea than in expression, in the *significat* itself than in the *modus significandi*" (*Foi et système,* Paris, Bloud et Cie., 180, 181), and this is confirmed by Le Roy himself in a footnote on page 70 of his *Dogme et critique.* A. Houtin in his history of Catholic modernism mentions the Rev. A. D. Sertillanges as expressing the same opinions in the referendum on Le Roy's article on dogma as Father Allo, and so far as we can ascertain, their writings have not been placed on the Index. Further, for a book to be placed on the Index does not mean that it is condemned, but the authorities intend to say that for some reason *hic et nunc* the book is not to be generally read.

This article of M. Edouard Le Roy entitled "Qu'est-ce qu'un dogme?" has even been looked upon with favor in some quarters by representative ecclesiastical authorities; and being of great importance, not only for Roman Catholicism, but also for Protestantism, yea generally for all religion, we take pleas-

ure in rendering it accessible to English readers.

It first appeared in the French fortnightly journal *La Quinzaine* of April 16, 1905, where it was accompanied by an editorial note as follows: "Without expressing any decision on our own part with regard to the opinions of M. Le Roy it seems to us both interesting and useful to take a text from his work by which to invite theologians to furnish the public with the elucidation he asks for. Hence we address a special invitation to all the authorized specialists in Catholic theology, to the professors of our liberal universities and of the larger seminaries, to religious orders, and to the priests."

The invitation was eagerly accepted, and seven later numbers of *La Quinzaine* contained communications of varying importance on the subject. But these formed only a small part of the discussion raised by this striking article. Its publication was followed by a vast array of controversial writings which

continued with increasing violence throughout an entire year. Twenty or more other journals opened their pages to the subject; not only such distinctly clerical journals as *Etudes, Revue thomiste, Revue du clergé français, La Croix,* etc., but also general philosophical reviews, *La Pensée contemporaine, Revue de philosophie,* and such liberal journals as *La Justice sociale, Le Peuple français,* and *La Vérité française.* And not only these religious and critical periodicals devoted their pages to the subject but a well-organized opposition to the offending article rushed into print through the daily press.

Still the question which the author put to the clergy in deference to them as being officially charged with the instruction of the people did not receive a satisfactory answer. Many heaped M. Le Roy with malicious calumnies, and many honestly misunderstood him. Many too misjudged him because they knew of the article only through garbled reports or hostile criticism. He therefore

considered it necessary to put the article in permanent form, and so he published it in a book entitled *Dogme et critique* (in the series *Etudes de philosophie et de critique religieuse* with Librairie Bloud et Cie.) together with his published replies to the most important of his adversaries, a careful bibliography of the controversy and a more detailed development of the most significant points of his thesis in fourteen brief additional chapters.

* * *

Religion is a practical affair, and its main purpose is to serve us as a guide through life. Religion as a sentiment is practically universal and we may consider it to be innate. It is a "pampathy" or all-feeling which produces in every individual a deep-felt longing to be at one with the whole universe of which each is a part.[1] As every material particle is an embodiment of gravitation in

[1] For a more complete definition of religion in its several phases see Carus's *Dawn of a New Era*, pp. 96-97.

proportion to its weight, and is possessed of a well-apportioned pressure somehow and bent some whither, so the souls of things existent feel themselves parts of the great whole in which they live and move and have their being.

This pampathy in its historical development under definite conditions assumes a definite form, and so religion leads necessarily and naturally to church life and church formation, with dogmas and regulations of conduct.

The dogmas of the church are collected in what has been called the symbolical books which accordingly contain the several confessions of faith. They are called symbolic because they served as symbols, or tokens of recognition to the members of the church. The man who could recite the symbol was welcome in the congregation as a brother who cherished the same faith, having found the same solutions of the world problem as the whole church and having accepted the same formulation of it.

The dogma is a symbol, but it is more

than a symbol; it is an appropriate symbol. It is a statement satisfactory to the whole congregation and in so far as it is satisfactory to the whole congregation it has become to them a truth.

Dogmas are truths. Being religious truths they are holy truths, and since they are taken seriously, they have often become the cause of much controversy and have led to quarrels and bloodshed, to persecution and warfare, to the establishment of the inquisition and denunciation of heretics. We now learn that the intellectual feature of the dogma is derived from the main and essential feature, its practical value. This is an enormous gain, for it introduces into the nature of dogma a condemnation of all intolerance and establishes an unlimited freedom of interpretation without, however, detracting a hair's breadth from the practical significance of the dogma.

Not one jot or one tittle shall pass from it, but a thinker is allowed to construct its meaning as best he can, pro-

vided he recognizes and holds on to its practical application.

God is our father; he is called upon in prayer as a personality—not a human personality, but a divine personality. The interpretation of personality is a problem by itself, but the significance of the dogma "God is a person" means that we should adjust our relation to God in such a way as to make it a personal relation, and this practical application constitutes the primary and underived significance of the dogma.

This view is not a loose way of treating the dogma; for the freedom of interpretation gives much liberty of speculation, but not an unlimited license. It is restricted and allows the dogma to stand and remain unalterable as the only possible, the only allowable, expression of a truth. Though the dogma is not absolute it is definite, and any other formulation of it would be wrong and must be rejected. Thus the view of dogma here represented by M. Le Roy remains as uncompromising as ever and would

not allow any dillydallying for the benefit of speculative minds.

It will be sufficient to characterize the author's effort and the misunderstandings created in the broad problem in his own words. They will show first the sincerity of his undertaking and explain the situation of his own mind, and secondly they will describe his critics and their inability to grasp M. Le Roy's point of view. A faithful Catholic's understanding of the nature of dogma is characterized by the article itself and for a summary of this phase of religious thought it is fully sufficient.

This is what our author says in speaking of himself (*Dogme et critique,* pp. v-x):

"On April 16, 1905, I published in the *Quinzaine* an article entitled 'What is a Dogma?' in which, speaking as a philosopher who desires to think his religion, I addressed various questions to theologians and apologists.

"Why did I use the form of interrogation instead of a direct exposition?

In deference to those who have official charge of instruction. It seemed to me desirable that the reply should come from them. In this way I hoped to manifest my intention to act always in conformity with the hierarchical principle divinely established in the Church. Although I have scarcely been able to congratulate myself on the reserve and courtesy I thus showed, since some have been pleased to see in it only a caution lacking in courage and candor, still I retain to-day the same way of looking at things. But be assured this does not in the least mean that I experience the slightest difficulty for my own part in reconciling faith and reason, nor that I hesitate or doubt the least bit in the world with regard to my duty as a Catholic.

"My aim was, briefly, to expose certain *facts* which I had had the opportunity to observe around me, and also to report an *experience* I had had in my relations with the unbelieving intellectual world. It was for the theologians, I thought, to

declare themselves after discussing the plan which I submitted to them. As for myself, I was only a witness testifying to what he had seen and come in touch with, a Christian soul relating some of the steps it had taken.

"This attitude has been misunderstood. It has been regarded as craftiness or malice, as a challenge or an irony. Some one spoke with reference to it of a question 'irreverently and even impertinently stated.'[2] Was not 'importunately' meant instead, without daring to say it, or admitting it? For, I beg to inquire, how may one set about being more deferential than I have been? Unless the only deference that is acceptable and sufficient is the deference of an indifferent or heedless silence. Is it true that the question asked was indiscreet? Certain papers hastened to make the claim, and the *Siècle* for instance was much diverted at the idea of Catholics not being able to agree on defining a dogma. These are certainly not my own

[2] *La vérité française,* Dec. 20, 1905.

sentiments. In asking an explanation I never intended to be, nor do I think I was, a trouble maker, disturbing slumber or ruffling tranquillity. But words like those I have mentioned tend to justify this ill-natured hypothesis, and therefore it is they which in the final analysis I find lacking in courtesy.

"For my part, on re-reading what I have written and feeling ready to write again, I declare with M. Fonsegrive:[3] 'Have we been wrong in saying these things out loud and, being Catholics, in having enough confidence in our religion, in the power of truth, to dare speak frankly, clearly, even vigorously? Would we have shown more regard for our beliefs if we had spoken timidly and feebly as one speaks at the bedside of the dying?' One must indeed stand up for oneself. We are neither dissembling Protestants nor disreputable rationalists. We are only searching always for the greatest religion, without concessions or haggling. We do not wish in the least

[3] *Quinzaine*, Jan. 1, 1906, p. 30.

to be either rebels or even eccentric persons. But our faith is firm enough for us not to fear to look the facts in the face and to speak out clearly what they show us; and we attach enough value to the divine word to wish to think with all the strength of our soul, assured in advance that there we will find life and light without other limitations than our own. Moreover we feel that we are enough protected by the living supremacy of the Church to preserve the most complete internal peace throughout our most venturesome inquiries. We are, in fine, sure enough of our obedience to legitimate authority to have no fear in running the commendable risks which the experience of life always entails. But the obedience we intend to render is not a simple obedience of formulas and motions, it is a profound obedience which lays hold of our whole being, heart, will and intelligence—in short, an obedience of reasonable men and free agents, not of slaves or mutes.

"Nevertheless, as soon as the article

'What is a Dogma?' appeared, a vast array of controversial writings began which continued with increasing violence during one whole year. Not only did the reviews take part, as was their natural business, but the daily papers as well. For after having reproached me for opening a discussion on such a subject before a public which though educated was not professionally qualified, they had nothing more urgent to do than to force the discussion before the eyes of a crowd which this time had neither proficiency nor culture. The organization of the exposure was perfect and the matter was abundantly exploited by those who make orthodoxy a monopoly or a standard and who are always to be found upon the heels of any one who takes the liberty of thinking for himself.

"To polemics conducted in this way I shall make no reply. Their authors, in spite of the pretensions they parade, are representative of nothing in the Church, and as, on the other hand, they do not discuss but condemn and anathematize,

substituting injury, slander or denunciations for arguments, they are representative of nothing from the intellectual point of view. What separates us from them is a question of morality much more than a question of critique.

"Fortunately other questioners have made their voices heard, loyal and disinterested questioners of broad minds and upright hearts, striving to understand and seeking nothing but the kingdom of God, the welfare of souls, the light of truth. The present volume is dedicated to them, to them and all those, whether known or unknown, who are like them. Is there any need of justifying oneself otherwise than by the words of Fenelon, which he might have taken for a motto: 'Every Christian, far from entering controversies, ought instead to explain his position more and more to try to satisfy those who have had trouble with the first explanation.' If this motive is not sufficient I may add that I cannot remain indifferent in the face of the opinions that have been attributed to me. Too

many people have become acquainted with my article only through incomplete analyses, through prejudiced reports or through refutations which may well confuse them; it is important that I should publish an authentic text with comments made necessary by the publicity the controversy has attained.

"For the rest, I still retain the same attitude I had at the beginning. I wish to put a question, nothing more. The accompanying comments and reflections are only to elucidate the meaning and the scope; to show also that it has not in the least been adequately answered; finally to furnish a definite theme for discussion and investigation. Who would dare to find occasion in this to accuse me of heresy?

"And now I have finished my task on this point; I have said what I had to say. The question has been asked, and nothing could prevent it from being asked. Henceforth the ideas will make their way of themselves and nothing will stop them. Let the future answer. Per-

haps we shall soon see what has often happened before, that what was once regarded as bold and disgraceful will end by being universally accepted as a very simple and commonplace matter."

* * *

According to Le Roy the intellectual feature of the dogma is not denied nor abrogated. On the contrary it remains in force and takes about the same place in religion as the laws of nature in natural science which formulate uniformities of facts but are not the actual phenomena as experienced. They both have their positive significance. It seems to me that in this way this conception of the dogma is helpful to educated people.

It is not necessary to make the interpretation of religion become a product of the Aristotelian philosophy. It would change theology into an *ancilla* of medieval thinking and deprive it of the liberty to adopt the scientific spirit.

While Le Roy's theory resembles pragmatism, one cannot characterize it

as purely pragmatic, and we should consider that the papal decree, *Lamentabile sane exitu* of July 3, 1907, condemns the views of those who claim that dogma is exclusively a *regula praeceptiva actionis* and that it is not a *regula fidei*. Nor is Le Roy an agnostic. He positively affirms that we can know God in relation to ourselves, and also that we can know him as he is *in se*. The essence of the dogma according to him is not exhausted in its moral significance, but includes also the *enunciatio speculativa*.

The distinction between the actionists and analogists is more one of words than of actual meaning, for both agree in presenting the truth concerning God in terms of intellectual conception and in terms of action, and thus both sides insist on a real cognition of God, each in its own terms. The whole controversy turns on this question, "Is practical truth contained in the speculative, or the speculative in the practical?" while we might say they are both two phases of the same. P. C.

WHAT IS A DOGMA?

THIS title, "What is a Dogma?" is only a simple question and by no means does it promise an answer. It is a question from the philosopher to the theologian calling for an answer from the theologian to the philosopher.

It would indeed be vain to pretend to give here a complete and definite answer to this complex question. Such problems cannot be solved in a few pages. Therefore the reader must not look for a settled doctrine in the short article which is to follow, nor even for categorical theses on any point. If he sometimes finds that I speak in too affirmative a tone let him be kind enough to admit that I do so only for the sake of greater clearness in my questions. In

fact I wish to confine myself to simple suggestions which I present merely as rough drafts of solutions offered for the criticism of those who have authority to judge of the subject. And moreover I can justify this attitude of mine by an imperative reason, namely that I am not a theologian and do not like to decide matters in which I am not proficient.

Perhaps some one will ask, why then do I take the trouble to treat a subject of which I admit I have no particular knowledge? Here is my reason. In our day every layman is called upon to fulfil the duty of apostleship in the incredulous world in which he lives. He alone can serve efficiently as the vehicle and intermediary of the Christian message to those who would not trust the priests. Therefore it is inevitable that some problems of apologetics should be laid before him, problems whose solution is an absolute necessity for him if he does not wish to fail in the task which the force of circumstances has laid upon him with-

out possibility of escape, if he wishes to be always ready, following the counsel of the Apostle, to satisfy those who ask him the reason for his faith. It is only natural therefore that I desire to be informed; and if I formulate my question publicly it is because I am not the only one in this situation, and because there is a general interest that the answer shall also be a public one.

Besides I have another motive for acting as I am. If I freely acknowledge my incompetence in a matter which is properly theological, yet on the other hand I consider that I am well situated to appreciate correctly the state of mind in contemporary philosophers that is opposed to the understanding of Christian truth. And it is to this that I bear witness in saying frankly, even brutally (if I must in order to be fully understood), what I know, what I have observed, what perhaps are not always sufficiently comprehended, namely the exact reasons why unbelieving philosophers of to-day repulse the truth that is brought to

them and the legitimate causes (agreeing in this with the Christian philosophers themselves) why they are not satisfied with the explanations that are furnished them.

My ambition goes no farther than to point out certain opinions, perhaps to suggest certain reflections, especially to particularize the statement of certain problems. If the present work bring a useful contribution to the studies of religious philosophy, if it furnish documents and materials which others can turn to account, I shall have attained my end. It is not a question of upholding a system nor of aligning arguments for or against this or that school, but only of elucidating certain fundamental ideas whose consideration is imposed upon every system and upon every school. An effort toward light in the bosom of Catholic truth, faithfully accepted in its completeness and rigor—this is what I submit to the decision of those who have been charged with the duty of defining and interpreting it.

What I desire above all, I repeat, is to make better known the state of mind of those contemporaries who think, the nature of the questions they ask themselves, the obstacles that hinder them and the difficulties that perplex them. It cannot be denied that the classical replies no longer satisfy them; there is no use in disputing over so obvious a fact. The experience of cultivated non-Christian circles (I might even say a personal experience) has demonstrated to me that the proofs brought forward as traditional have no effect on intellects accustomed to the discipline of contemporary science and philosophy. Now why this new impotence of old methods which have sufficed so long? The reason appears to me to be, at least in great measure, that the old apologetics assumes the greater part of the problems to be solved in advance which the moderns, on the other hand, judge to be essential and primordial. The real difficulty for the moderns comes in altogether before the arguments begin by

which the theologians flatter themselves they can convince them; it lies in the postulates taken for granted and in the very manner in which the investigation is approached.

It will be well to see how the questions ought to be put to-day; this should be the first result to be obtained. It is the chief result, for without it we would never arrive at anything serious. Thus is imposed the preliminary task of coming in contact with the minds whom one wishes to address and whom one claims to understand. It is necessary that the various chapters of the apologetic should be taken up successively from this point of view in order to be brought to general attention; and in examining here the idea of dogma[1] I only give a first example of the kind of work that I think ought to be generally undertaken.

Let no one think such a task profitless or superfluous. On the contrary, noth-

[1] I will say once for all that by "dogma" I mean especially the "dogmatic proposition," the "dogmatic formula," not at all the reality which underlies it.

ing is of greater urgency to-day nor of more pressing necessity. It is strange and lamentable how little we on the Catholic side know or how greatly we fail to appreciate the state of mind of the opponents to whom we try to speak.[2] Nor are we listened to or understood. What we say has no response and carries no weight. We exert ourselves in silence and in a void without even giving rise to any criticism or refutation. In short we only reach those who do not need to be reached—I mean those who are convinced beforehand or whose difficulties are not of a theoretical kind. We must not deceive ourselves. Catholic thought at the present day is without notable influence on the various intellectual movements which are developing around us. It sometimes follows them at a distance and after having resisted them for a long time; but nowhere does it appear capable of directing them, much less of promoting them. There

[2] I would say the same, moreover, of our opponents with respect to us.

is nothing more sad than to confess so many efforts expended without result on the one hand, and on the other hand so many sincere questions asked which remain unanswered.

Doubtless one might say, and indeed some have said, that there is no need of taking into account modern demands because they proceed from a perverted and misguided judgment. Wretched subterfuge! What contemporaneous thought is asking for beyond what it receives is perfectly legitimate, and there is no justification in pretending to refuse to grant it. Men of to-day are within their rights in not consenting to be held down to the point of view of the thirteenth century. It would indeed be strange if any one should ask for a proof to support a truth of this kind.[3] After all, is it not the very mission and the *raison d'être* of apologetics to address itself to the disordered, if such

[3] The object of faith always remains the same but not the manner of thinking it or of complying with it.

there be? It must take people as they are and not require of them that they first come of their own accord where it may prefer. Once again, it would be strange if one had no right to make a cure except with certain remedies.

Hence there may be some interest and some profit in the testimony of those whose situation has put them in a position to know the modern mind, its needs and its requirements. These may try to tell how they have come to think what they believe, how they have succeeded in practically overcoming, and of their own accord, the difficulties that they have met like the others. I do not say that we must accept the conclusions of their experiences uncritically; but after all, these experiences offer the advantage of furnishing living documents, not dead opinions, and that is something. I here make no further claim.

One more word before I begin. Perhaps the reader will be surprised to find so long a preamble introducing so short an article. The reason is first of all

that I wished to write a sort of general preface for other similar articles intended to follow this one, and also because I wished in this way to forestall any possible misunderstanding. Whatever opinion may be held on the ideas which I shall put forth, it must not happen that any one will try to answer me by charging me with heresy. I affirm nothing in this work except facts easily verifiable by everybody. As to the rest, that is to say the sketches of theories, whatever the form of the language which I have adopted in order to make myself clear, I give them expressly as simple *interrogations* addressed to whomsoever they may concern. In a word, I do nothing but state some problems; it is for the apologists and theologians to solve them.

* * *

We no longer live in the day of partial heresies. Formerly a purely logical and dialectic argumentation might suffice because certain common principles were always admitted on both sides. But

the case is no longer the same to-day, when these principles go by default, when the fundamental difficulty is to establish a point of departure upon which both sides may agree. To-day denial does not attack one dogma any more than another. It consists above all in a preliminary and total demurrer. The question is not whether a proposition is a dogma or not; it is the very idea of dogma which is repugnant, which gives offense. Why is that?

When we examine the ordinary motives of this repugnance we find four principal ones which I shall briefly enumerate, endeavoring to present them in all their force:

1. A dogma is a statement presented as being neither proved nor provable.[4] Those who declare it to be true declare at the same time that it is impossible ever to arrive at the point of grasping the intimate reasons of its truth. Now modern thought, faithful to the precept of Leibniz, endeavors more and more to

[4] I mean here to speak of *intrinsic* proof.

demonstrate the old so-called axioms. At least it wishes to justify them with Kant by a critical analysis which shows them to be necessary conditions of consciousness implied *a priori* in every act of reason. It is distrustful of those evidences, pretending to be direct, which were so numerous in former times. Often enough it discovers in them simple postulates adopted for an end of practical utility more or less unconsciously perceived.[5] In short everywhere and always it calls for long and detailed discussions before believing itself authorized to draw conclusions. And it is not just any more or less roundabout proof that it thus demands, but direct specific proofs. It does not like too general arguments which look upon vast assemblages as a whole and proceed by wholesale demonstrations, because it has had experience too many times with the illusions, mistakes and oversights which they ordinarily conceal. Nor does it

[5] Compare the *Philosophie nouvelle* edition of Bergson's works.

like any better external, extrinsic arguments which end in proofs of a negative character, in *reductiones ad absurdum* founded on judgments of contradiction or impossibility, because it has also had experience[6] too many times with their imprudent and hazardous character to declare either impossible or contradictory a thing which may appear so to us only from habit. Therefore it seems that in order to remain faithful to the tendencies which have assured its success in all domains modern thought can do no less than condemn absolutely the very idea of a strictly dogmatic proposition. In what system acceptable to reason could such a proposition find room without violence? Is not the first principle of scientific method incontestably, according to Descartes, that it must hold as true only what clearly appears to be true? What justification would there be for making an exception of just those propositions which pass as the most important, the most profound and

[6] Especially in the sciences.

the simplest of all? When affirmations are of the greatest consequence and refer to the most difficult and recondite subjects it is certainly not fitting to show oneself less attentive to the exactness of the rules which constitute our protection against error. On the contrary it is just then that it would be legitimate to be even more exacting, more scrupulous, more particular than usual.

2. It will doubtless be said that dogmatic propositions are never affirmed without proof. In fact an indirect demonstration has been attempted over and over again. One certain apologetic which is regarded as purely traditional[7] claims to prove that these propositions are true, although it realizes that it is incapable of bringing fully to light the how and the why of their truth. There is some analogy, it seems, between such a proceeding and that of the mathema-

[7] This method of *extrinsic* demonstration is regarded as traditional. Here is a historical point on which much might be said, but such a discussion is foreign to my subject.

tician who limits himself at times to the theorems of simple existence, or that of the physicist who often accepts facts of which he cannot give any theoretical explanation, or yet again of the historian who always receives knowledge only by the path of testimony. Thus would end the first objection.

Yes, here we would have a very simple solution, but there is one misfortune, namely that the analogy pointed out proves upon reflection to be absolutely inaccurate. The difficulty we wish to avoid reappears *in toto* when we try to justify postulates on which the alleged indirect demonstration rests. When a mathematician is satisfied with establishing a theorem of simple existence, I mean a theorem affirming the existence of a solution inaccessible in itself, he reasons no less rigorously than in other branches of his science. Now here we have nothing like that. It would be necessary to prove *directly* that God exists, that he has spoken, that he has said this and that, that we possess his

authentic teachings to-day. This amounts to the same thing as saying that the problem of God, the problem of revelation, of the inspiration of the Bible and of the authority of the Church, must be solved by a *direct* analysis. Now these are questions of the same kind as the strictly dogmatic questions, questions with reference to which it is indeed impossible to produce arguments comparable to those of the mathematician. Likewise when a physicist accepts a fact to which he can give no theoretical explanation this fact corresponds, at least for him, to certain definite experiences, to certain manipulations that can be practically carried out, in short to a group of motions of which he has direct knowledge. What similarity is there here? And finally even the historian does not consent to receive truth by testimony except because he is dealing with phenomena of the same kind as those of which he has a direct view by some other means. He still regards his science as always conjectural and un-

certain so long as it treats of somewhat profound causes or of events that are more or less remote. How much more ought one to draw the same conclusion in the case of dogmas which reflect only facts that are mysterious, strange and disconcerting, and to which no analogy in our human experience corresponds! It has been well done. The alleged indirect proof has inevitably for its basis an appeal to the transcendence of pure authority. It claims[8] to introduce the truth into us fundamentally from the outside in the fashion of a ready-made "thing" which might enter into us forcibly. Thus any dogma whatever seems like a subservience, like a limit to the rights of thought, like a menace of intellectual tyranny, like a shackle and a restriction imposed from without upon the liberty of investigation—all of which is radically opposed to the very life of the spirit, to its need of autonomy and sincerity, to its generative and funda-

[8] Or at least appears to claim, which is the form under which it is too often presented.

mental principle which is the principle of immanence.

Let us insist a little upon this last point, for the principle of immanence has not always been rightly understood. Too often it has been made out a monster, whereas nothing is more simple nor on the whole more clear. We may say that to have gained a clear consciousness of it is the essential result of modern philosophy. Who refuses to admit it is from that time forth no longer counted among the number of philosophers, who does not succeed in understanding it indicates thereby that he has not the philosophic sense. And this is what constitutes the principle of immanence. Reality is not made of separate pieces put in juxtaposition, but everything is within everything else; in the smallest detail of nature or of science analysis recognizes all of science and all of nature. Each of our states and of our actions comprises our entire soul and the totality of its powers. Thought, in a word, is wholly included

in each of its moments or degrees. In short, there is never for us a purely external fact like some sort of raw material. Such a fact indeed would remain absolutely unassimilable, unthinkable; it would be a nonentity to us, for where could we take hold of it? Experience itself is not in the least an acquisition of "things" which previously were entirely unknown to us. No, it is much more a transition from the implicit to the explicit, a profound movement revealing to us the latent requirements and actual abundance in the system of knowledge already explained, an effort of organic development, putting to use its reserves or arousing needs which increase our activity. Thus no truth ever enters into us except as it is postulated by that which precedes it as a more or less necessary complement; just as an article of food to become valuable as nourishment presupposes in the one who receives it certain preliminary dispositions and preparations, for instance, the appeal of hunger and the ability to di-

gest. In the same way the statement of a scientific fact presents this character, no fact having meaning nor, consequently, existing for us except by a theory in which it is born.

On these various points a critical examination of the sciences has recently come to confirm the reflection of the philosophers. It is obvious that I could not enter here into detail,[9] but the little that I have said will doubtless suffice to give a glimpse at least of how that which has been called *extrinsicism*[10] is opposed in spirit, attitude and method to modern thought.

3. In spite of what we have just said let us admit, however, the instruction of dogmas by simple affirmation of a doctrinal authority which is accepted almost without criticism. Nevertheless,

[9] See the *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie,* meeting of February 25, 1904.

[10] Blondel uses the term *extrincésisme* together with *historicisme* to denote two kinds of apologetics which he condemns. See his article on "Histoire et dogme" in *La Quinzaine* of Jan. 15, Feb. 1 and Feb. 15 of 1904.

in order to be acceptable these dogmas would need to be perfectly intelligible in their statements, leaving no room for any ambiguity of interpretation or any possibility of error with regard to their real meaning. Now this is not the case. In the first place their formulas often belong to the language of a particular philosophical system which is not always easily understood, which does not always escape the danger of equivocation or even of contradiction. There is no doubt, for instance, that the doctrine of the Word in origin and context is closely connected with Alexandrian neo-Platonism; that the theory of substance and form in the sacraments and that of the relations between substance and accidents in the dogma of the real presence, are really closely connected with Aristotelian and scholastic conceptions. Now these diverse philosophies are sometimes doubtful as to their basis and obscure as to their expression. In any event they have long been antiquated, fallen into disuse among philosophers

and scholars. Would it therefore be necessary, in order to be Christians, to commence by being converted to these philosophies? This would be a difficult undertaking, before which many believers themselves would feel strangely embarrassed. And moreover even this would not suffice, for the confusion of many languages resulting from heterogeneous philosophies constitutes still another difficulty no less troublesome than the first.

But this is not all. Aside from this, dogmatic formulas contain metaphors borrowed from every-day matters, for instance when they speak of the Divine Fatherhood or Sonship. It is impossible to give an exact intellectual interpretation of these metaphors, and consequently to determine their precise theoretical value. They are images which cannot be converted into concepts. It would require anthropomorphism to take them literally, and at the same time it would be difficult to give them any deep significance. One cannot even

handle them without reserve, nor follow them to a conclusion without arriving too quickly at ridiculous consequences and absurdities. Hence arises a great uncertainty that continues to increase the confusion of imaginative symbols with the abstract formulas of which we were just speaking.

After all, the first difficulty with regard to dogmas which many people find to-day consists in the fact that they do not succeed in discovering a thinkable meaning in them. These statements tell them nothing, or rather seem to them to be indissolubly connected with a state of mind which they no longer possess and to which they think they are no longer able to return without degenerating. Moreover many believers are virtually of the same opinion, and prefer to refrain from all reflection, foreseeing certain obstacles that they would meet in thinking what they believe under the forms laid before them. A contemporaneous philosopher has said: "What would most embarrass the greater num-

ber of believers would be if, before asking them for a *proof* of what they believe, one were simply to call upon them to *define* exactly what it is they *affirm* and what they *deny*."[11]

4. Finally, let us pass over these difficulties. Even after they are disposed of there still remains a last objection which seems very grave, namely that in any event dogmas form a group incommensurable with the whole of positive knowledge. Neither by their content nor by their logical nature do they belong to the same system of knowledge as other propositions. They therefore could not be arranged with others in a way to form a coherent system, so that if one accepts them the result is an inevitable breach of unity in the mind, a disastrous necessity of playing a double part. Being unalterable they appear foreign to progress, which is the very essence of thought. Being transcendent

[11] Belot, *Bibliothèque du congrès internationale de philosophie de 1900.* Paris, Armand Colin.

they exist without relation to effective intellectual life. They bring no increase of light to any of the problems which occupy science and philosophy. Thus the least reproach that one can cast upon them is that they seem to be without profit, to be useless and barren—a very grave reproach in a period when it becomes more and more perceptible that the value of a truth is measured above all by the services that it renders, by the new results that it suggests, by the consequences which it brings forth, in short by the vivifying influence it exerts on the entire body of knowledge.

Such, briefly summed up, are the principal reasons why the idea of any dogma whatever is repugnant to modern thought. I have endeavored to present them in all their force, taking the same point of view in setting them forth as those who regard them as conclusive, and speaking, so to say, not in my own name but in theirs. It remains now to investigate some conclusions and some

lessons which we ought to be able to derive from them.

These reasons, it must be recognized, are perfectly valid. I do not see any legitimate way of refuting the preceding line of argument.[12] The principles which it invokes seem to me no more contestable than the deductions which it draws from them. In fact I do not see that it has ever been answered except by worthless subtleties or rhetorical artifices.[13] But eloquence is not a proof, neither is diplomacy. Hence our only real resource is to prove that the idea of dogma which is condemned and rejected by modern thought, is *not* the Catholic idea of dogma.

Perhaps it will be found that in speaking in this way I depart from the role to which I have promised to confine myself, that this time decidedly I am stating theses and not asking questions.

[12] I say refuting, but it could be *cut short* by destroying the postulate which is its root.

[13] It would be interesting to enter into a detailed discussion of these answers, but there is no room for it here.

This would be a mistake. There is no doubt that I am affirming something here, but what? Nothing but *facts*. It is a fact that the unbelievers of to-day are halted in the face of dogmas by the foregoing objections. It is also a fact that whoever (even among believers) has truly comprehended the spirit and the methods of contemporary science and philosophy, cannot but give his assent to these objections. Now please note: those very people who submit most completely and most cordially to the authority established over them could not be affected by it. No authority indeed could bring it about or prevent that I find an argument valid or weak, nor especially that this or that notion has or has not any meaning for me. I not only say that no authority has any right in the world to do so, but that it is absolutely impossible; for after all it is I who do the thinking and not the authority that thinks for me. No argument could prevail against this fact. I can neither force myself to feel satis-

faction nor prevent myself from feeling it at the evidence on one side or another. To be sure I admit that authority imposes upon me this or that belief with the result that it makes me follow this or that line of conduct, but how could it compel me by virtue of such a proof to believe what I do not regard as convincing? And how would I be able to obey it if it commanded me to understand this or that declaration which I did not understand at all? As well might it require me to cease thinking. No *reason* can be founded on faith. Here we have an *identity* pure and simple. There is no such thing as *revealed logic.*

Hence I come back to what I said a while ago, and, *speaking as a philosopher,* I declare myself incapable of thinking differently from our adversaries on the above-mentioned points.

Moreover in making this declaration I consider that I am doing nothing but stating a problem. The state of mind which I have described exists, it is tri-

umphant to-day; even those who believe the most firmly share it. These are the *facts* which it is impossible not to take into account and which constitute, I repeat, the statement of a question to be solved. Let us see exactly what this question is.

I shall henceforth regard it as granted that the objections summed up above cannot be evaded so long as the idea of dogma which they contain is preserved. Does this mean that we must conclude definitely that there is an absolute incompatibility between the idea of dogma and the essential conditions of reasonable thought? That in order to think as a Christian it is necessary to cease thinking altogether? I certainly do not believe so. But to avoid the objections in the case and to obtain the desired harmony I ask myself if it is not the very manner in which the idea of dogma is presented that is the real cause of the contention, and if consequently we have not reason to change this manner.[14]

[14] I beg the reader to give heed to the limits

Now when we examine the conception of dogma which the four objections above enumerated assume and imply, we are surprised to find that it is common to the greater number of Catholics and their opponents. It is a distinctly intellectual conception. It regards the practical and moral meaning of the dogma as secondary and derived and places in the first rank its intellectual meaning, believing that this constitutes the dogma whereas the other is merely a consequence of it. In a word, it makes of a dogma something like the statement of a theorem—an intangible statement of an undemonstrable theorem, but a statement having nevertheless a speculative and theoretical character and relating above all to pure knowledge. This is the common postulate that one discovers by analysis at the foundation of

within which this question is comprised. It does not discuss in any way the modification of the content of dogma, nor even its traditional religious interpretation, but only the determination of the modality of the dogmatic judgment and of the qualification it possesses.

both of the two opposed doctrines, the one that accepts and the one that rejects the idea of dogma. Here I believe is the crux of the difficulty. From this unexpressed postulate and from the conception which flows from it originate, in my opinion, both the abuses to which the idea of dogma can give rise and the conscientious objections that it raises. Indeed it is inevitable that one would finally draw the conclusion that all dogma was illegitimate, for he would at the same time define it as a theoretical statement while nevertheless attributing to it characteristics the very opposite of those which make statements correct. It is very curious that the apologists are not more often informed of a fact of such great importance as that their conception of dogma would destroy in advance the theses that they wish to establish. On the other hand, the same intellectualist idea of dogma leads to two very regrettable and unfortunately very frequent exaggerations; one consists of confusing dogmas properly so

called with certain opinions and certain theological systems, that is to say, with intellectual accessory representations; the other, in failing to see that a dogma could never possess any scientific significance and that there are no more dogmas concerning for instance biological evolution than there are concerning the movements of planets or the compressibility of gas.

From a thorough study of these various points we reach the conviction that the problem of dogma is usually badly stated;[15] and perhaps we will see at the same time how it ought to be stated in order to render possible a satisfactory solution.

* * *

From this point I enter at once into the domain in which I must keep myself in an interrogatory attitude. This is my definite intention although to insure clearness I may keep the didactic tone. What follows must be taken as a simple

[15] At least in books in current use and in elementary education.

exposition of what I ordinarily reply to those who ask me what I think of the idea of dogma. Am I wrong to speak in this way? I am quite ready to acknowledge it if any one will show me that it is not the right way in the eyes of the Church.

First of all I say that a dogma cannot be compared to a theorem, of which we only know the statement without its proof and whose proof can only be guaranteed by the assertion of a teacher. Nevertheless I know that this is the most common conception. We like to think of God in the act of revelation as a very wise professor whose word we must believe when he communicates to his audience results whose proof that audience is not capable of understanding. But this appears to me to be hardly satisfactory. We say that God has spoken. What does the word "speak" mean in this case? Most certainly it is a metaphor. What is the reality which it conceals? Herein lies the whole difficulty.

Without recurring to the general considerations I have already developed let us take some examples that will serve to specify what we have hitherto looked upon only in large outlines.

"God is a person." Here we have a dogma. Let us try to see in it a statement having above all an intellectual meaning and a speculative interest, a proposition belonging first of all to the order of theoretical knowledge. I pass over the difficulties aroused by the word "God," but let us consider the word "person." How must we understand it?

If we grant that the use of this word bids us conceive the divine personality in the form shown to us by psychological experience on the model of what common sense designates by the same name, as a human personality, idealized and carried on to perfection, we have here a complete anthropomorphism, and Catholics would certainly agree with their opponents in rejecting such a conception. Moreover to carry such a thought to its extreme limits is a very

delicate thing, very likely to induce error or at least mere verbiage, incapable in any event of producing anything more than very vague metaphors and perhaps even eventually contradictory results.

Shall we limit ourselves to saying that the divine personality is essentially incomparable and transcendent? Very well, but if so it is very badly named, and in a way which seems made expressly to induce delusion. For if we declare that the divine personality does not resemble in any respect that with which we are acquainted, what right have we to call it "personality"? Logically it should be designated by a word which would belong only to God, which could not be employed in any other instance. This word would therefore be intrinsically undefinable. Let us imagine any assemblage whatever of syllables deprived of all possible significance. Let A be this assemblage. Then by our hypothesis "God is a person" does not have any other meaning than "God is A." Is this an idea?

The dilemma is unsolvable for any one who is seeking an intellectual interpretation of the dogma "God is a person." Either he will define the word "personality," and then he is fatally sure to fall into anthropomorphism; or he will not define it, and then he will fall none the less fatally into agnosticism. Here we have a circle.

The same remarks hold with regard to the propositions "God is conscious of himself; God loves, wills, thinks, etc."

Let us take another example, the resurrection of Jesus. If this dogma, whatever may be eventually its practical consequences, has for its first aim to increase our knowledge in guaranteeing to us the accuracy of a certain fact, if it constitutes before all a statement of an intellectual character, the question to which it first gives rise is this: What precise meaning does it assume is to be attached to the word "resurrecton"? Jesus, after having experienced death, has once more become alive. What does this mean from the theoretical point of view?

Doubtless nothing except that after three days Jesus reappeared in a state identical with that in which he was before he was nailed on the cross. Now the Gospel itself tells us exactly the opposite. The resurrected Jesus was no longer subject to ordinary physical or physiological laws; his "glorified" body was no longer perceptible in the same conditions as before, etc. What does this mean? The idea of life has not the same content when applied to the period preceding the crucifixion as to that which followed it. Now what does the word represent with relation to this second period? Nothing that can be expressed by concepts. It is simply a metaphor which cannot be converted into specific ideas. Here again, to be exact, it would be necessary to create a new word, a word reserved for this single case, a word consequently to which it would not be possible to give any regular definition.

Let us borrow a final example from the dogma of the real presence. Here

it is the term "presence" which must be interpreted. What does it usually signify? A being is said to be present when he is perceptible, or when though he himself cannot be grasped by perception he yet manifests himself by perceptible effects. Now according to the dogma itself neither of these two circumstances is realized in the case in hand. The presence in question is a mysterious presence, ineffable, unique, without analogy to anything that one ordinarily understands by that name. Now I ask what idea is there here for us? A thing that can neither be analyzed nor even defined could not be called an "idea" except by an abuse of the word. We wish a dogma to be a statement of an intellectual order. What does it state? It is impossible to say exactly. Does not this fact condemn the hypothesis?

Finally the pretension of conceiving dogmas as statements whose first function would be to communicate certain theoretical bits of knowledge would run

against impossibilities on every hand. It seems to end inevitably in reducing dogmas to pure nonsense. Perhaps it must for this reason be resolutely abandoned. Let us therefore see what different kind of significance remains possible and legitimate.

* * *

First of all, if I do not deceive myself, a dogma has a *negative* meaning. It excludes and condemns certain errors instead of positively determining the truth.[16]

Let us once more take up our former examples. We shall first consider the dogma "God is a person." I nowhere see in it any definition of the divine personality. It teaches me nothing about that personality. It does not reveal its nature to me nor furnish me with any explicit idea. But I see clearly that it tells me, "God is not impersonal"; that is to say, God is not simply a law,

[16] We shall shortly see how dogmas are more and greater than this. But at the start I shall place myself in a strictly intellectual point of view.

a formal category, an ideal principle, an abstract entity, any more than he is a universal substance, or some unknown cosmic force diffused throughout the world. In short, the dogma "God is a person" does not bring to me any new positive conception nor does it any more guarantee to me the truth of any particular system among those which the history of philosophy shows to have been successively proposed, but it warns me that this or that form of pantheism is false and ought to be rejected.

I would say the same with regard to the real presence. The dogma does not tell me any theory about that presence, it does not even teach me in what it consists; but it tells me very clearly that it must not be understood in such or such a way as were formerly proposed, that for instance the consecrated host must not be regarded solely as a symbol or a figure of Jesus.

The resurrection of Christ gives rise to the same remarks. The dogma does not teach me in any degree what was the

mechanism of this unique fact nor of what kind the second life of Jesus was. In short it does not communicate a conception to me. But on the contrary it excludes certain conceptions that I might be tempted to make. Death has not put an end to the activity of Jesus with reference to the things of this world. He still mediates and lives among us, and not at all merely as a thinker who has disappeared and left behind a rich and living influence and whose work has left results through the ages; he is literally our contemporary. In short, death has not been for him, as it is for ordinary mortals, the definite cessation of practical activity. This is what the dogma of resurrection teaches us.

Shall I insist further? It does not seem advisable at this time. The foregoing examples are sufficient to make the principle of interpretation that I have in mind clearly understood. Of course long expositions would be necessary if we would enumerate in detail all the consequences of this principle and

all its possible applications, and an enumerative study of the different dogmas would therefore become indispensable. But this is not my real purpose. I wish to confine myself simply to indicating an ideal. This is why I do not undertake either to multiply examples or even to develop any one of them completely.

Moreover the idea is not a new one. It belongs to the most authentic tradition. Is it not indeed the classical teaching of theologians and scholars that in supernatural matters the surest method of investigation is the *via negationis*? Permit me to recall in this connection a well-known text of St. Thomas: "But the *via remotionis* is to be used chiefly in considering divine substance. For divine substance by its immensity exceeds every form which our mind can touch; and so we cannot grasp it by knowing what it is, but some sort of a notion of it we have by knowing what it is not."[17]

[17] "Est autem via remotionis utendum praecipue in consideratione divinae substantiae.

Nevertheless I ought to point out one objection which might occur to the mind. We will easily grant that the dogmatic formulation promulgated by the Church in the course of history has especially a negative character, at least when looked upon from an intellectual point of view as we are doing at this time. In fact, the Church itself declares that its mission is not in the least to produce new revelations but only to maintain the *depositum revelationis,* and the negative method here adopted is entirely suitable for this mission. And yet, of what does this *depositum* consist if not of a certain collection of original affirmations? Take the primary expression of Christian faith, the Credo. What could be more positive? Now here is the basis of doctrine, that which characterizes and constitutes it. Moreover when we

Nam divina substantia omnem formam, quam intellectus noster attingit, sua immensitate excedit; et sic ipsam apprehendere non possumus, cognoscendo quid est, sed aliqualem ejus habemus notitiam cognoscendo quod non est." —*Contra Gentiles,* I, xiv.

say "revelation" we certainly say affirmation and not negation.

Certainly we do. I do not contradict it in the least, but we must make a distinction. The creed of Nicaea and Constantinople contains many traces of a negative dogmatic elaboration: for instance, on the divinity of Christ as against the Arian heresy; on the procession of the Holy Ghost in opposition to the Macedonians, etc.[18] Consequently there is nothing on this head to contradict our conclusions. It is only the grammatical form which is affirmative here; in reality we are treating of errors to be excluded rather than theories to be formulated. But let us take the Apostles' Creed. Here indeed we have nothing negative but neither do we have anything properly intellectual and theoretical, nothing which belongs properly to the order of speculative knowledge, nothing in short which resembles the statement of theorems. It is a profes-

[18] It would be easy to insist on the example of *consubstantialem* or of *Filioque*.

sion of faith, a declaration of attitude. We shall soon examine dogmas from this practical point of view (which I hasten to say is in my eyes the principal point of view), yet we shall stop a moment at the intellectual point of view. The Apostolic Creed in its original form affirms the existence of realities of which it gives not even a rudimentary representative theory, hence its only role with reference to abstract and reflective knowledge is *to state objects and therefore problems.* Finally we see that the proposed objection is not valid and we can maintain our thesis until further notice.

Thus in so far as they are statements of a theoretical order dogmas have all a negative meaning. History proves this when it procures our assistance at the birth of one after another of them in relation to the several heresies.[19] The rise of all dogmas has always followed the same course, has always presented

[19] Compare the usual formula of the decrees of council: *"Si quis dixerit..., anathema sit."*

the same phases: at the beginning purely human speculations, some explanatory systems very similar to other philosophical systems, in short, attempts at theories relating to religious facts, to mysterious realities experienced by Christendom in its practical faith; then only come the dogmas for the purpose of condemning certain of these attempts, of taxing certain of these conceptions with error and of excluding certain of these intellectual representations. Hence it follows that dogmatic formulas often borrow expressions from different philosophies without taking the trouble to fuse together and unify these heterogeneous languages.

This offers no more disadvantages than does the use of concepts derived from different origins, from the moment that dogmas do not tend to constitute by themselves a rational theory, an intelligible system of positive affirmations, but confine themselves to opposing certain exceptions to certain hypotheses and conjectures of the human mind. On

the other hand it is natural that each dogma should put itself in the point of view belonging to the doctrine that it lays under an interdict, in order to attack it directly without danger of ambiguity. Hence it also follows that dogmatic formulas can enact laws on the incomparable and the transcendent and yet not fall into the contradictions of anthropomorphism or of agnosticism. It is man who with his opinions, his theories and systems, gives to dogmas their intelligible substance;[20] these are confined to pronouncing a veto at times, to declaring at times that "such an opinion, such a theory, such a system, is not allowed," without ever pointing out why they should not be accepted, nor by what they must be replaced. Thus negative dogmatic definitions do not limit

[20] From the theoretical point of view, understand. Dogmas are thought in terms of the human systems which they oppose. [This view is recently endorsed by Catholic theologians of such recognized authority as Cardinal Billot, S. J.—Tr.]

knowledge nor put an end to progress; in short they only close up false paths.

From the strictly intellectual point of view it seems to me that dogmas have only the negative and prohibitive sense of which I speak. If they formulated absolute truth in adequate terms (to assume that such a fiction has a meaning) they would be unintelligible to us. If they gave only an imperfect truth, relative and mutable, they would not be justified in obtruding. The only radical way to put an end to all the objections on principle against dogma is to conceive of them, as we have already said, as being undefinable in so far as they are speculative propositions, except with relation to previous doctrines upon which they promulgate an unwarranted judgment. Moreover is it not the teaching of theologians, including most intellectualists, that in a dogmatic statement the reasons which can be incorporated in the text are not in themselves objects of faith imposed upon belief?

There is one important consequence

resulting from the foregoing, namely, that the true method of studying dogmas (from the intellectual point of view, understand) is the historical method. The science known as positive theology, or rather the history of dogma, seeks to perform this task. The method has an effective apologetic value much greater than purely dialectic dissertations. Because in any event it is impossible to comprehend dogmatic statements, there is the greater reason for justifying them if one would commence by plunging them once more into their natural historical environment without which their authentic meaning becomes more and more vague and finally ends by vanishing entirely.

Nevertheless dogmas do not have merely a negative meaning, and even the negative meaning that they offer when regarded from a certain direction does not constitute their essential and primary significance. This is true because they are not merely propositions of a theoretical character, because they

must not be examined solely from the intellectual point of view, from the point of view of knowledge. This is what we shall now elucidate further.

* * *

Here more than ever I insist that the intention and tendency of the pages to follow must not be misunderstood. I repeat that the affirmative tone is used only as a means for clearness. At bottom the question is always the same as I specified at the beginning. Here, if I may say so, is the form in which experience has shown me that the notion of dogma is most easily assimilable to the minds of to-day:

A dogma has above all a *practical* meaning. It states before all a prescription of a practical kind. It is more than all the formula of a rule of practical conduct. This is its principal value, this its positive significance. This does not mean, however, that it must be without relation to thought, for (1) there are also certain duties concerned with the

act of thought; (2) it is virtually affirmed by the dogma itself that under one form or another reality contains wherewith to justify the prescribed conduct as reasonable and wholesome.

I take pleasure in quoting in this connection the following passage from R. P. Laberthonnière:[21] "Dogmas are not simply enigmatical and obscure formulas which God has promulgated in the name of his omnipotence to mortify the pride of our spirits. They have a moral and practical meaning; they have a vital meaning more or less accessible to us according to the degree of spirituality we possess."

After all, when converts, in spite of good intentions, themselves create part of the theoretical difficulties under discussion do we not answer them daily: "Never mind all that, it is not important. Do not believe that God requires so many formalities. Come to him fairly, frankly, simply, according to the wise

[21] *Essais de philosophie religieuse,* p. 272. Paris, Lethielleux.

words of Bossuet. Religion is not so much an intellectual adherence to a system of speculative propositions as it is a living participation in mysterious realities." Why not then make theory agree with practice?

Let us keep the same examples. They represent well enough the different types of dogmas. "God is a person" means, "Conduct yourself in your relations to God as in your relations with a human person." Likewise "Jesus has risen" means, "Be in relation to him as you would have been before his death, as you are with a contemporary." In the same way again the dogma of the real presence means that one must have the same attitude toward the consecrated host as one would have toward Jesus had he become visible, and so on. It would be easy to multiply these examples, and also to develop each of them farther.[22]

[22] I do not claim in the least that the foregoing comments exhaust the meaning of the dogmas mentioned: they will suffice to point out a line of inquiry.

That dogmas can and ought to be interpreted in this way there is no doubt, and the fact will not be contested by any one. In fact, it cannot be repeated too often that Christianity is not a system of speculative philosophy but a source and regimen of life, a discipline of moral and religious action, in short the sum total of practical means to obtain salvation. What then is surprising in the fact that its dogmas primarily concern conduct rather than pure reflective knowledge?[23]

I do not think it is necessary to insist farther upon this point, but I wish to indicate in a few brief words the most important consequences of the principle here laid down.

First of all it is clear that the general objections summed up at the beginning of this article do not affect this conception of dogma to the same extent and in the same degree as they do the

[23] This is why assent to dogmas is always a free act and not the inevitable result of a compelling line of argument.

usual intellectualist conception, for that provokes the conflict and renders the difficulty insurmountable, whereas on the other hand we may now catch a glimpse of a possible solution. As there is no question of obtaining a theoretical statement in conditions radically opposed to those prescribed by scientific method, we no longer find ourselves face to face with a logical stumbling-block but only with a problem referring to relations between thought and action—a difficult problem certainly, but not unapproachable and one which at any rate does not appear absurd after it is stated.

Of course there are always important questions to be solved. It is necessary to supply the dogma in some way with a demonstration and justification, and this is by no means a perfectly easy matter. Nevertheless one of the greatest obstacles has been smoothed away. Practical truths are established differently from speculative truths. Recourse to authority which is entirely inadmissible in the realm of pure thought seems a

priori less shocking in the domain of action, because if authority has legitimate rights anywhere it certainly has in the domain of practical affairs.

The Council of the Vatican tells us: "If any shall say that no true mysteries properly so called are contained in divine revelation, but that all the dogmas of faith can be comprehended and demonstrated through reason duly perfected by natural principles, let him be anathema."[24] Now if faith in dogmas were first of all knowledge, an adherence to some statements of an intellectual kind, one could not comprehend either that assent to unsolvable mysteries could ever be legitimate or even simply possible, or in what it might consist, or what sort of utility or value it might have for us, or how it might constitute a virtue. On the other hand all this can be understood if faith in dogmas is a practical

[24] "Si quis dixerit in revelatione divina nulla vera et proprie dicta mysteria contineri, sed universa fidei dogmata posse per rationem rite excultam a naturalibus principiis intelligi et demonstrari, anathema sit."

submission to commandments which have to do with action. Nothing is more normal than activity placing mysteries before intelligence.[25]

The Council of the Vatican tells us further: "If any shall say that assent to the Christian faith is not free.... let him be anathema."[26] This text is generally explained by recognizing that the reasons for believing, the motives of credibility, are not of insuperable force, a mathematical evidence, and that in consequence a decisive act of the will or of the heart is always necessary to conclude the investigation definitely. Is this not virtually admitting that one cannot see in belief in dogmas an act which should first of all be intellectual without making it thereby inferior to the ordinary acts of thought? How would such an act—an act performed under conditions contrary to the nature

[25] Submission to dogmas then from one point of view is for the believer what submission to facts is for the scholar.

[26] "Si quis dixerit assensum fidei Christianae non esse liberum...., anathema sit."

of thought — be even legitimate or merely possible? But on the other hand it is easy to believe that the practical acceptance of commandments relating to action depends on our free will and gains in perfection by not being able to manifest itself by necessary consequence. Let us insist a little upon this point, for it is of highest importance in the problem of the relation between reason and faith.

From the beginning apologetics is confronted with a grave difficulty which perhaps cannot always be satisfactorily disposed of. On the one hand it is clearly understood that an act of faith is a free act and that its object, as well as its supreme motive, is supernatural. But on the other hand an act of reason ought to precede and prepare the act of faith, for it is by reason alone that the obligation and necessity of overreaching reason can be recognized. And an act of reason must also constantly accompany the act of faith, for it is necessary that the human mind shall have

some sort of hold upon the dogma if it wishes to accept it. St. Thomas said well: "Those things which are under the faith....no one would believe unless he sees they ought to be believed."[27]

Now how shall we reconcile these two opposite requirements in a system of intellectualist interpretation? Either we would maintain (as there are some who do) that the apologetic proofs are absolutely positive and exact; and then what would become of the liberty of the act of faith? Or in order to safeguard that liberty we would call them insufficient and only more or less probable; and then our faith would lack any basis, for after all an insufficient proof is not an acceptable proof, especially in so important and difficult a matter. An intellectualist attitude becomes disarmed in the face of this dilemma since liberty does not belong to the domain of pure intelligence and has no place or part in the proceeding of discursive reason.

[27] "Ea quae subsunt fidei.... nemo crederet nisi videret ea esse credenda."

But with the other attitude the dilemma can be solved because this time the dialectic in the case is action and life, not simply argument, and liberty revives with life and action.

Likewise we have here the objection relating to the intelligibility of dogmatic formulas. Although these formulas are hopelessly obscure, even inconceivable, when we want them to furnish positive determinations of truth from a speculative and theoretical point of view, they nevertheless show themselves capable of clearness if we are careful not to ask of them anything but instruction as to practical conduct. What difficulty, for instance, do we find in understanding the dogmas of the divine personality, of the real presence, or the resurrection, in the practical system of interpretation just outlined? Although these dogmas are mysteries for the intelligence that demands explanatory theories they are nevertheless susceptible of perfectly clear statement as to what they prescribe for our actions.

Hence the language of common sense has its place as well as the use of anthropomorphic symbols and the employment of analogies or metaphors, and neither the one nor the other gives rise to unsolvable complications since this time it is a question only of propositions relating to man and his attitudes.

We also see now what the relation is between dogmas and efficient life. We predict for them a possibility of experimental study and of gradual research which has heretofore escaped us. Finally we understand how they can be common to all, accessible to all, in spite of the inequality between intellects, whereas to conceive them in the intellectualist way one would be inevitably led to make a distinction of an intellectual aristocracy. I have not room here to develop these different considerations as much as I should like, but I imagine that a simple indication after all may be sufficient for the time being, and that the reader can carry the process on for himself without any difficulty. Nevertheless it seems

necessary to me to prevent a possible objection in order to avoid all misapprehension.

I have spoken of *practice*. This word must be rightly understood. I take it in the widest acceptation of the term. *Action* and *life* are here synonymous. Hence the word does not in the least mean a blind step, without relation to thought or consciousness. In fact there is an act of thought which accompanies all our actions, a life of thought which mingles throughout our life; in other words, to know is a function of life, a practical act in its way. This function, this act, is also called *experience*, a name which indicates at the same time that we are not at all dealing with actions performed without any sort of light but that the light in question is not that of simple argumentative reason.

I have also spoken of the activity which places mysteries before intelligence, and by way of elucidation I have cited the example of scientific facts. To comprehend what I mean by this, one

must not forget that a scientific fact is not a thing to be submitted to passively. If there is any semblance of a purely external fact, of a mystery totally opaque, of a violent commandment from without, it is so with respect to argumentative understanding. But the thought-action of which I was just now speaking avoids this appearance. It infinitely exceeds the purely intellectual thought. I have not heard anything to affirm otherwise.[28]

Hence there is a necessary relation between dogmas and thought. It is at the same time both a right and a duty not to be content with a blind belief in dogmas but to strive also in proportion to one's strength to think them. The system of separation, of tight partitions, of the twofold accountability of conscience, is not desirable nor, to speak truthfully, possible. It is contrary to the demands of that faith which wishes

[28] The reader who desires to pursue this point further may refer to several articles I have published since 1889 in the *Revue de métaphysique et de morale*, and in the *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie*.

to hold every man; it is contrary to the requirements of philosophy which desires a spiritual unity; and finally it is contrary to the requirements of morality which cannot approve an action that is systematically unconsidered.

But thought when applied to dogmas should not misunderstand their primarily practical meaning. The path to be followed is the test of practical experience and not an intellectual dialectic. The inspiring principle is perfectly expressed in the sacred word, *qui facit veritatem venit ad lucem.*

Thus translated into terms of action the traditional methods of *analogy* and *eminence* assume a very clear significance. Under the guise of metaphors and images they affirm that supernatural reality contains the wherewith to make obligatory by law that our attitude and our conduct with regard to it should have such or such a character. The images and metaphors—which are hopelessly vague and fallacious when one tries to see in them any approximation

whatever of impossible concepts — become on the other hand wonderfully illuminating and suggestive after one looks to find in them only a language of action translating truth by its practical echo within ourselves.

It remains finally to specify the relations of dogmas, understood in the way we have described them, to theoretical and speculative thought, to pure knowledge. In what respect do they govern our intellectual life? How does their intangible and transcendent character leave the full liberty of research intact as well as the undeniable right of the mind to repulse every conception which tries to impose itself from without? We shall easily see.

The Catholic is obliged to assent to the dogmas without reservation. But what is thereby imposed upon him is not in the least a theory, an intellectual representation. Such a constraint indeed would inevitably lead to undesirable consequences: (1) the dogmas would in that case be reduced to purely verbal

formulas, to simple words whose repetition would constitute a sort of unintelligible command; (2) moreover these dogmas could not be common to all times nor to all intelligences.[29]

No, dogmas are not at all like that. As we have seen, their meaning is above all practical and moral. The Catholic, obliged to accept them, is not restrained by them except as regards rules of conduct, not as regards any particular conceptions. Nor is he condemned to accept them as simple literal formulas. On the contrary, they offer him a very positive content, explicitly intelligible and comprehensible. I will add that this content, having to do solely with the practical, is not relative to the variable degree of intelligence and knowledge; it remains exactly the same for the scholar and the ignorant man, for the exalted and the lowly, for the ages of advanced civilization and for the races still in

[29] In the two words "esotericism" and "Pharisaism" would be the inevitable rock upon which they would split.

barbarism. In short it is independent of the successive states through which human thought passes in its effort toward knowledge, and thus there is *only one faith for everybody.*

This being granted, the Catholic after having accepted the dogmas retains full liberty to make for himself whatever theory, or whatever intellectual representation he wishes of the corresponding objects—the divine personality, the real presence, or the resurrection, for instance. It remains with him to grant his preference to the theory which best agrees with his own views, to the intellectual representation which he deems the best. His position in this respect is the same as that toward any scientific or philosophical speculation, and he is free to adopt the same attitude in both cases. Only one thing is imposed upon him, only one obligation is incumbent upon him; his theory must justify the practical rules expressed by the dogma, his intellectual representation must take into account the practical edicts pre-

scribed by the dogma. Thus in a word it appears almost like the statement of a fact with regard to which it is possible to construct many different theories but which every theory must take into account, like the expression of a truth many of whose intellectual representations are legitimate but of which no explanatory system can well be independent.[80]

From this naturally follows the step that we have recognized as usual with religious thought in its effort at elaboration. Let us take any dogma whatever, Divine Personality, the real presence or the resurrection of Jesus. By itself and in itself it has only a practical meaning. *But there is a mysterious reality corresponding to it and therefore it presents to the intelligence a theoretical problem.* The human intellect at once takes possession of this problem; and obeying simply and solely the laws

[80] It is at this point that we must distinguish between *intellectual formula* and the *underlying reality* in the dogma.

of its own nature it imagines the explanations, the answers, the systems codified in the precepts of scientific method and the principles of reason.[31] As long as the theory constructed in this way respects the practical significance of the dogma it is given *carte blanche*. Hence to pass judgment on the theories remains the task of pure human speculation, and any authority exterior to the thought itself has neither the right nor the power to interfere.[32] But once let a theory arise which makes an attack on dogma in its own domain by altering its practical significance, and the dogma would immediately array itself against it and condemn it, thus becoming a negative intellectual statement

[31] In this respect the Middle Ages had an independence and a boldness which we have forgotten.

[32] Religious authority which has souls in its charge can indicate certain theories as dangerous, as long as they run the risk of being wrongly understood and thus of reacting injuriously upon conduct. Hence arise censures of an inferior note to those of heresy. But these condemnations are not properly dogmatic.

superimposed upon the rule of conduct which at first it was, purely and simply.

Hence one sees positively how the two meanings of a dogma, the practical meaning and the negative meaning, are reunited, the latter being subordinated to the former. Moreover we see how dogmas are immutable and yet how there is an evolution of dogmas. What remains constant in the dogma is the orientation that it gives to our practical activity, the direction in which it inflects our conduct. But the explanatory theories, the intellectual representations, change constantly in the course of the ages according to individuals and epochs, freed from all the fluctuations and all the aspects of relativity manifested by the history of the human mind. The Christians of the first centuries did not profess the same opinions on the nature and personality of Jesus as we, and they did not have the same problems. The ignorant man to-day does not have at all the same ideas on these lofty and difficult subjects as the philosopher does, nor the same

mental preoccupations. But whether ignorant men or philosophers, men of the first or the twentieth century, every Catholic has always had and always will have the same practical attitude with regard to Jesus.

* * *

It is time to conclude, and I will do so in as few and brief words as possible.

Two main results seem to me to have been attained by the foregoing discussion:

1. The intellectualist conception which is current to-day renders the greater number of objections raised by the idea of dogma unsolvable.

2. On the other hand, a doctrine of primacy of action permits a solution of the problem without abandoning either the rights of thought or the requirements of dogma.

If these conclusions were admitted, the apologetics of our days would be under the irresistible necessity of modi-

fying many of its arguments and methods.

Now, can these conclusions be admitted without loss to faith? It is for the theologians to tell us, and in case their response is negative to teach us how they expect otherwise to prepare to surmount the obstacles which perplex us.

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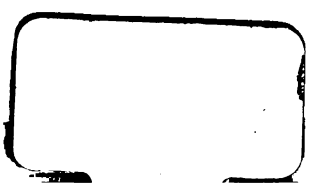
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